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A

DIALOGUE

Between two
Church of England-Men

Concerning Matters of

RELIGION,

As set forth in the

PULPIT.

Francis. **H**Or now, Neighbour William, you have put on a very Solemn Face this Morning; pray, what makes you so Sober?

William. Oh! I have had my Head full all this Night of nothing but Fire and Faggots; and when I awak'd this Morning, I could not perswade my self to open my Eyes, or stir Hand or Foot, thinking I had been fastn'd to a Stake in Smithfield. And the cold Sweat is not off me yet.

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Fran.

Fran. *This was a very Unseasonable Dream, considering the Peace we now enjoy. But what should raise these Fancies in your Head at this time of the day?*

Will. I can't tell, unless it was the Relicks of a *Sermon* I heard the last *Sunday*, in which were made several severe Reflections upon the *Papists*; they were not nam'd, yet every Body knew the meaning. And I believe this has rais'd all the Frightful Notions, and horrid Ideas I had in the time of the *Popish Plot*. And to tell you the Truth, these thoughts have been the Subject of my Meditation for these Two Hours, and I cannot tell how to get them out of my Head.

Fran. *Fy, fy. All this in a Dream was pardonable; but Awake and Serious, and still to go on with these Phantoms, reflects upon your Judgment. Can you fear a Thunder-bolt, when there's never a Cloud to be seen in the Sky?*

Will. Ay, but the *Gospel* must be fulfill'd. Don't you consider, that our *Ministers* preach to us the *Gospel*? And have not they, these many years, been shewing unto us, with the *Bible* in their Hands, the cruelty and *Bloodiness* of the *Papists*, their *Secret Conspiracies*, and *Open Violence*, their *Treacheries* and *Falshood*, their

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Murders and Affassinations. And when I reflect, that at this day, we have so many *Papists* on every side of us, *Papists* in Power, *Papists* Counsellours, *Papists* Commanders, *Papists* Justices, so many *Papists* Souldiers, every one a Sword by his side; and what is worst of all, such a Number of *Plotting Jesuits* walking the Streets, all in *Disguise*, that no Body can tell how or when to get out of their way; how can I think of this without trembling? Well, I shall certainly never dare to go to bed again without a double Guard at my Door: And whensoever I lie down, I must expect to rise with my Throat cut.

Fran. You begin to raise the vapors in my Brain: And now you have put into my head, what the *Papists* are even according to our Gospel, I can't tell how to think my self safe amongst them. If any one should have told us Seven Years ago, that within so short a time we should have come to be under their Government, could we possibly have surviv'd the News? would not this voice of Terror and Death have left us without Spirit or Life? We were then, I remember, affraid of the very Name and Shadow of a *Papist*; and could we imagine it possible for us at any time to live in Peace and Safety, with their

Hand, and Sword over our Heads ?

Will. No certainly, if there was any Truth in our Gospel, this could not be possible.

Fran. Ay; but now I think on't; there's no Gospel to be believ'd contrary to our Senses. And therefore since we See and Feel our selves in Peace and Safety amidst so many Papists; we must not take those Sermons in a Literal Sense, which told us so much of the Bloodiness of the Papists, and that there could be no Peace expected for Protestants under such a Government.

Will. This would be some Relief to an afflicted Soul, were this Doctrine a Church of England Doctrine. But I fear you have a mind to flatter me into a little Comfort, by some vain imagination of your own.

Fran. No, you may rely upon what I tell you; I have heard it from Dr. Stillingfleet, Tillotson, Tonnison, Sherloc, Pellin, and the rest of our Ministry, that when any thing in the Gospel contradicts our Senses and Reason, it is not to be taken in a Literal Sense. And do you now apply this Principle to our present Circumstances, and see how far it may work upon you. Have not we been under a Prince of that Perswasion for above Two Years? We have had so many Papists in Office, as you contemplate; so many Papists Souldiers, and such a num-
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ber of Priests and Jesuits on every side of us; and yet have we not all this while enjoyed our Liberty? Have we not possess'd our Estates in quiet? Has any force been us'd upon our Persons? Has any ones Property been invaded? Have our Throats been in danger from their Swords; or our Houses from Fire-balls? Have we been oppress'd with Taxes, or wasted in Wars? Call in your Eyes and Ears, your Hands, all your Senses and Reason to witness, and if these declare to you the Truth of what I tell you; what disturbance can all the Sermons you have formerly heard, and now hear, cause in you; since from the Information of your Senses, you are assur'd, that those Terrors and Prophetic Threats of Misery and Slavery, contain'd in them, are not to be understood Literally; but in some other Sense, which I believe Scholars and Politicians can give a better account of than I?

will You give me some ease: Death withdraws it self from before my Eyes; my Heart begins to dilate it self, and my Blood returns into its Vessels. But pray Neighbour, now you put it into my Head, what should be the meaning then of all those sermons we have heard from our Pulpits, concerning the Papists? When I come out of Church, I cannot imagine

the *Papists* to be any thing but *Fools* and *Idiots*, *Monsters* of *Impiety* and *Barbarity*. And yet in my *Conversation* and *Contracts* with them, I find them to be like other *Men*: And now, as you say, we have more fully experienc'd, in the *Reign* of our present *Sovereign*, that in the enjoyment of our *Liberty*, the *Peace* and *Welfare* of the *Nation*, we have as great *Blessings* to expect from a *Papist*, as from any *Protestant* *Prince* whatsoever. How are these things to be reconcil'd?

Fran. You put me upon a very *Ungrateful* *Subject*. But for the relief of your troubles and mine own, I'll lay before you some *Observations* I have made upon the *Pulpit*, I hope no body ever hears me.

Will. No, no danger. Pray go on, and by a charitable *Discourse* perfect your *Cure*; for if you leave me as I am, I fear on the next *Sunday* the *Noise* of *Pogery* will make me *Relapse*.

Fran. I'll tell you then: About *Seven Years* ago, I took a resolution of making a *Collection* of all such *Sermons* as should come out in *Print*: For I thought I, when I have them by me, I shall be able to read them as I list; I can with more *seriousness* apply my self to that *Divine Study*, and from their
Informa-

Information, as from the Gospel, learn Truth and Falshood, what to embrace and what to fly. As I had resolv'd, so I did; intending by them to steer my Life, my Judgment, and my Conversation. But Four Years were not well over, when I discover'd my mistake, and found that all was not Gospel, which I had taken for Gospel.

Wib. Let not this be told in Gath, nor mention'd in the streets of Ascalon: Pray what do you mean? Is it not the Gospel then, we hear from the Pulpit?

Fran. The Text is out of the Gospel; but for what follows, it depends upon the Preacher; and requires the Consideration of the Auditory before it be trusted. You know we are often advis'd from the Chair, Not to go Blindfold, nor take things upon Trust; and this (as I find) they intend should be understood of their Sermons, as well as of other things, that are propos'd to us. However, one thing I have observ'd in the perusal of my Collection; that when Preachers in their Sermons treat of Morality, directing their Flock to the Observance of a Good Life, teaching them to love their Neighbour, to be at Peace with all men, to Forgive Injuries, to be Merciful, Patient, Humble, and Sincere, to do no wrong, &c. In this case, besides their Text
being

being Gospel, the Word of God generally spreads it self throughout their whole Sermon, and they are to be heark'ned to like to an Angel of God. But when you hear them begin to talk aloud of Parties and People, of Papists, Jesuits, Dissenters, Plots and Designs, when you hear them usher in a Discourse with, There are a sort of People in the World, &c. Then stand upon your Guard; for at this time they begin generally to leave the Gospel; the Auditory is to consider and believe them as far as they think fit: but for their Bibles, they may put them up in their Pockets; there being nothing of all this to be found there.

Will. This is a good Observation, and I hope will secure me against all Relapses. For now when I go to Church, I shall know when to believe, and when to suspend all belief; I shall be able to distinguish, what is to sink into the *Heart*, from what is to pass no farther than the *Ear*. Hitherto I confess. I have been so Inconsiderate, as to take all for Gospel, that I heard from the *Pulpit*: and this has been unhappily the occasion of my Misfortune and Trouble; it has fill'd me with Fears and Jealousies, and made my Life uneasy. And indeed I could not well avoid this mistake, seeing that I scarce
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ever heard any *Parson*, whether upon a *Moral Subject*, or upon *Plots and Jesuits*, but he seem'd to read all alike out of his *Bible*.

Fran. Yes, but you are to consider the difference between the *Pulpit-Bible*, and the *Pue-Bibles*. Those, which the People have in their hands, contain nothing but the *Pure Word of God*, without any Addition. But those, which you see held forth from the *Pulpits*, have a great deal more in them, than ever was writ by the *Evangelists*, or others of the *Sacred Pen-men*. They have *Notes* in them of every mans own writing. Could you ever imagine that all that you have heard in *Sermons* of the *Po-pish Plot* was writ or known by the *Apostles*?

Will. How could I tell, but They being favour'd with the *Spirit of Prophecy*, might foresee what was to come in our days: and by some hint or *Mystic Expressions* give directions to our *Preachers*, how to behave themselves, when such things should happen. And, if I am not much mistaken, I have heard it prov'd in a *Sermon*, that *Oats* and *Bedloe* were foretold by the *Scripture*; and that any one that had but a competent *Spirit of Interpretation*, might easily discover, that These were the *Two Witnesses* mention'd in the *Apocalypse*.

Fran.

Fran. *I can't tell, but it might be in some of the Ministers Bibles at that time ; but I question whether it be there now. For as I told you, Their Word of God is not always the same, it changes and alters according to Times and Seasons, especially when the Subject is Plotting. But as for the Peoples Bible, I dare be bound 'twas never in any of them. Did you ever find it in yours ?*

Will. I took always the Preacher's word for it, that 'twas *Authentic Scripture* ; but, I confess, I could never read it so in mine. There might be so much difference in the *Edition*, as there is in other prophane Books, for all as I know. But indeed, one thing I have all along observ'd, which hits very well with your Remark, that whilst the *Ministers* are discoursing upon *Morality* and a *Good life*, the People sit very Serious and Demure, but something *Dull*, as if they were hearing a *Repetition* of what they had often read themselves, in their own Books ; but still with their Bibles in their hands : But when the Ministers turn from that Subject, and enter upon *Jesuits*, or *Phanatics*, or upon *Plots* ; then the People begin to perk up themselves, to stand up Brisk and Attentive, lay aside their Books ; as if what they were then hear-

hearing, were something *New* ; such as if they did not make it their own, whilst 'twas dropping from the *Pulpit*, might be lost, and could no where be found in their *Bibles* at their return home.

Fran. *You are in the right on't, for there's nothing of all this to be found in the Bible. Nay, many times, 'tis so far from being the Word of God, that it has no relation to it; but is built on no better Foundation, than a Narrative of some Knight of the Post, a Popular Rumor, or some Uncertain History.*

Will. What! And yet pass for a *Sermon*?

Fran. *For a Sermon? I'll warrant you, I can shew you hundreds of Sermons, that have been preach'd before the Gravest Assemblies in the Nation, and influenc'd them in as good earnest, as if the Holy Ghost had been the Mover; and yet had no better Text to prove what they deliver'd, than the Word of Villanous Man,*

Will. You confound me quite. What the *Word of Men* deliver'd for the *Word of God*; and of *Villanous Men* too!

Fran. *Yes, of Perjur'd Villains, of Miscreants. So that I can name you several Eminent Men. after they have taken their Text, as they must do, out of the Bible, fall presently to their Dividing, Expounding, Proving, and Application, and in these,*
follow

follow so closely Oats and Bedloe, that a Man would take These Doctors for the only Commentators upon the Text. And I believe it must be These Sermons, that have fill'd your Head thus with Stakes and Faggots.

Will. I doubt not, but these have been greatly the Occasion of my Distemper. But You are my Physician, and I hope you have pretty well cur'd me. However, I think I had best stay from Church Three or Four *Sundays*, for fear if I should go there and hear again a Noise of Popery, I might be surpris'd, and take all for Scripture, that's deliver'd with the Bible in hand, and so my Distemper should return upon me. People that are newly recover'd, ought not to be too venturesome. What think you?

Fran. Never fear: Remember, but the Directions I have given you, and go upon my account. If you are the worse for't, I'll undertake to cure you for nothing. I have only apply'd to you a General Remedy as yet, and you are the better for't. But I have other Particular Receipts far beyond all you have had hitherto.

Will. Well, I'll observe your Directions; but if I hear any thing there, and am the worse for't; you shall be sure to hear of me again.

F I N I S.